



Vieques National Wildlife Refuge

Achievements and Accomplishments



Visitors enjoy Bahia de la Chiva (Blue Beach).

of Vieques National Wildlife Refuge when 3,100 acres of the western end of the island were transferred to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and one year since the addition of the eastern end. Looking back, we have accomplished and achieved much towards our mission.

The Mission of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is to work with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the people.

What has the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service been doing for the past three years?

■ Opened Refuge headquarters.

In 2002, the refuge headquarters opened to the public in Isabel Segunda welcoming all visitors.

■ Held a job fair and open house.

We sponsored a local job fair to inform the community about temporary and permanent employment positions and the tremendous opportunity to volunteer. An

open house was held to provide information about the refuge and its resources.

■ Hired 50% of Vieques National Wildlife Refuge employees from Vieques.

Vieques National Wildlife Refuge has ten employees. From maintenance workers to law enforcement, Viequenses have filled these positions. The other positions have been filled by Puerto Ricans from other areas.

■ Developed the first Youth Conservation Corps also called "YCC".

The Youth Conservation Corps is a summer employment program for young men and women age 15 through 18, from all segments of society, who work, learn, and earn together by doing projects on public lands. The first YCC program in Vieques started in 2002 employing ten young men and women. The program continued in 2003 and the refuge is

looking forward to the 2004 YCC group. Some of their duties include reforestation, beach clean-up, and maintaining visitor facilities.

■ United with local junior high school teacher Julián García Martínez and his junior high school group "Huellas sobre la Arena", (Footprints on the Sand), to conserve and protect sea turtles.

For years, García Martínez was concerned about sea turtle conservation. When the land was transferred to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service García

Martínez and his junior high school student group called "Huellas sobre la Arena" became the first volunteers working towards sea turtle conservation. The refuge provides vehicle, equipment, and a stipend to García Martínez so that he can



Julian Garcia Martinez receives Regional Director Volunteer Award.

continue his work. As a result of García Martínez efforts and dedication, he obtained the 2003 Regional Director Volunteer Award in Atlanta, Georgia.

■ Conducted interpretive and environmental education programs to local schools and organizations, universities, and interested groups.

In the past three years, we have presented many programs to hundreds of students and members of other interested groups. We have also responded to scores of requests for information concerning the refuge's issues and resources.

■ Enhanced visitor recreational opportunities and facilities for the local community and tourists.

According to the Puerto Rico Tourism Company occupancy rates in Vieques, January and February of 2004 were 22% more than in January and February of 2003. Viequenses, visitors coming from all over Puerto Rico and off-island enjoy hiking, biking, wildlife observation, photography, fishing and beach use.

Playa La Chiva (Blue Beach) and Playa Caracas (Red Beach) are open to the public for the first time since 1999. These two beaches are open from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm. Facilities at Bahía de la Chiva and Bahía Corcho have been renovated for visitor enjoyment and safety. Furthermore, various parts of the refuge have been reforested to provide a natural setting and for the benefit of wildlife.

The future management plan for Vieques National Wildlife Refuge called the Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) will provide direction to future recreational opportunities on the refuge.

■ Started the planning process for the future management of Vieques National Wildlife Refuge.

In 2003, the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge began the planning process called the Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). The CCP will provide a framework for guiding refuge management decisions. Through our public meetings and open houses, the community of Vieques and other interested people will have an opportunity to share their ideas and views, which will be vital for the Comprehensive Conservation Plan of Vieques National Wildlife Refuge.

■ Finalized a conservation plan with the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources of Puerto Rico (DNER) and Puerto Rico Conservation Trust (PRCT) for the conservation of the western end of Vieques.

In 2001, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service signed a Cooperative Agreement with DNER and PRCT for the protection and conservation of the western end of Vieques. The finalized plan is a preliminary step in collaborative action and cooperation to manage the fragile natural resources of Vieques island effectively. The partners in this effort

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support and advocate a program of research to further scientific understanding of the processes associated with the fragile systems.

Where is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service heading?

The next years offer both challenges and opportunities. We look forward to continuing the journey of protecting and conserving Vieques National Wildlife Refuge resources. We cannot do this alone! Your input and recommendations are important for the future of this treasure.

■ Continue coordinating with all federal and local agencies in relation to the environmental clean up.

The Navy is carrying out the environmental cleanup process. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will continue to coordinate with the Navy and continue working closely with the Puerto Rico Environmental Quality (EQB) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in achieving an adequate clean up for people and wildlife.

■ Continue involving the public in the Comprehensive Conservation Plan of Vieques National Wildlife Refuge.

Your views and ideas are important! All interested people are welcome to attend the upcoming CCP open house to discuss the future of Vieques National Wildlife



Refuge Manager Oscar Diaz encouraging students to consider careers in wildlife management.

Refuge. Written comments are also welcome. It is estimated that the process will take two to three years to complete. Once the CCP is completed, refuge management will have a clear direction and continuity for management of the refuge for the next 15 years. The plan will address the management of plant species, wildlife, endangered species, natural and cultural resources, contaminants, recreational opportunities, education, research, and partnerships.

Vieques National Wildlife Refuge is an important component of the sustainable economic development of Vieques. It cannot fulfill the National Wildlife Refuge System mission without coordination with other refuges, federal, state and local agencies. Public involvement is an integral part of the planning process and will be incorporated through scoping meetings, document review, and public hearings. For this reason, we invite individual citizens and institutions to become active players in a shared commitment to achieve the CCP objectives of Vieques National Wildlife Refuge.

For more information or any questions about Vieques National Wildlife Refuge contact:

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Refuge Manager Oscar Diaz giving an educational tour.